



Working Lands Alliance

A Project of American Farmland Trust

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Testimony Concerning HB 6357, Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Submitted by the Working Lands Alliance to the Education Committee February 15, 2013

The Working Lands Alliance appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning a troubling aspect of the Governor's budget recommendations—namely, the Governor's proposal to use the Community Investment Act as a source of funding for implementation of the CT Department of Education's Healthy Food Certification. While we laud the goal of Healthy Food Certification, we urge the Committee to reject the Governor's proposal to raid a unrelated, dedicated funding stream for this purpose.

The Working Lands Alliance (WLA) is a broad-based coalition dedicated to saving Connecticut's farmland. Our membership reflects the diversity of organizations, businesses, and individuals that care deeply about our working lands and the farmers who steward them—from the CT Farm Bureau and CT State Grange, to End Hunger CT! and Wholesome Wave, to CT Forest and Parks Association and the CT Land Conservation Council.

In 2005, WLA joined together with farmers, environmentalists, historic preservationists, and housing advocates to champion the Community Investment Act. We did so to create a dedicated revenue stream—financed through deed recording fees collected locally—to spur state investments in our communities and leverage private, municipal and federal resources. The "CIA" has been an enormous success. It has leveraged 2 dollars in non-state funds for every dollar it has generated. It has created more than 2000 jobs just in historic preservation and affordable housing-related projects. It has helped to stabilize the state's dairy farms, which manage more than half of the state's farmland and provide Connecticut residents with a dependable source of fresh milk. It has spurred investment in food and farm enterprises, and helped consumers identify CT-grown farm and food products. It has encouraged municipalities to support local farms and helped the state's Department of Agriculture to increase the pace of its farmland protection efforts. And because of that increased pace, the CIA has influenced the decisions of many farm families and farmland owners to pursue farmland protection options rather than selling their land for development. This is enormously important in a state that lost more than 10% of its farmland in just the last 25 years.

The Governor's proposal to use the CIA as a piggybank for Healthy Food Certification would have a large and hurtful impact on the programs that are investing in important community priorities through the CIA. Based on the 2011-2012 revenues generated through the CIA, about \$20.7 million, the proposal would divert almost 20% of the CIA's revenue stream. Since the proposal envisions a flat \$4 million annual diversion, that percent could be even higher in years where fees generated through the act declined from the current baseline.

As troubling is the Governor's proposal to permanently incorporate Healthy Food Certification as a component of the CIA. Again, WLA appreciates the value of the certification approach, and understands that certification has been an effective tool at improving the nutritional value of foods offered in public schools around the state. However, there is absolutely no nexus between this certification process and the authorized purposes of the Community Investment Act. The investments through the CIA are place-based, grounded in land, housing, and historic sites. The investments that are not tied directly to land or housing or historic preservation are investments aimed at improving the viability of small businesses that steward our state's land resources.

Enactment of the CIA in 2005 was a significant, hard fought and bipartisan achievement. Its strength and success is owed to the dedicated revenue stream that gives state agencies and municipalities a reliable means to plan for and make investments. Diluting the CIA by adding an entirely unrelated funding purpose not only reduces the level of current investments through the CIA, but opens the door in an inviting way to other, further diversion of CIA funds for General Fund-type purposes. We urge the Committee to resist the temptation to use the CIA for this purpose, and stand ready to help in any way we can to find other ways to fund the Department of Education's valuable and effective Healthy Food Certification.